

## **KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

### **STAFF NOTE**

#### **Review Item:**

704 KAR 3:340, Commonwealth Diploma Program

#### **Applicable Statute or Regulation:**

704 KAR 3:340; KRS 156.070; KRS 156:160

#### **History/Background:**

***Existing Policy.*** The Commonwealth Diploma Program began as a Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) initiative in the mid 1980's as a recognition program to encourage high academic achievement in Kentucky high schools, to improve the working relationship between high schools and colleges and universities and to allow students to gain college credit prior to attending college. The current requirements for the Commonwealth Diploma are based on students completing at least 22 units of credit including the minimum graduation requirements, any additional courses specified by the local board of education, successful completion of the pre-college curriculum, at least four (4) Advanced Placement (AP) or four (4) International Baccalaureate (IB) courses with a grade of "C" or better, and completion of one (1) AP Examination in at least three (3) of the AP or IB content areas without regard to score.

Currently school districts submit the names and verification of the students who have met the requirements for the Commonwealth Diploma to the Department of Education. Staff prepares the Commonwealth Diplomas and sends them to the school districts to award at graduation ceremonies.

In the 2004-05 school year, one thousand four hundred and fifty-seven (1457) students earned a Commonwealth Diploma. Twelve hundred fifty-four (1254) of those students were public school graduations and two hundred three (203) were from non-public institutions.

***A Call for Change.*** The KBE asked staff to review the current program and to propose revisions to the Commonwealth Diploma program to ensure it is rigorous and performance-based for student accountability, includes opportunities for students to engage in coursework leading to a Commonwealth Diploma that is aligned to students' Individual Graduation Plans and recognizes student achievement.

In the past, the KBE has been concerned about the lack of performance-based measures for student accountability beyond a grade of "C" or better. The AP scores for the exams taken during the senior year are not sent to each student's home, high school and any colleges designated by the student until the summer by the College Board. The results of

the exams taken the senior year arrive too late to factor into the awarding of the diploma. The KBE also has explored possible incentives for students receiving a Commonwealth Diploma, alternative types of assessments to the Advanced Placement exams and the idea of expanding the framework for the Commonwealth Diploma to allow students different paths for attaining the Commonwealth Diploma.

With the discussions on raising the rigor of the high school graduation requirements and the increased focus on student accountability, it is an appropriate time to make adjustments in the requirements for the Commonwealth Diploma Program. Attached is the proposed revised administrative regulation. A comparison chart is included in Appendix A to illustrate the proposed changes.

### **Policy Issues:**

- KDE recommends providing for student choice and flexibility through closer alignment of Commonwealth Diploma to the Individual Graduation Plan. Does the KBE concur?
- KDE recommends to require at least one passing score on one AP or IB exam that will be taken prior to the senior year in order to get scores back in time for award. Does the KBE concur?
- KDE recommends including the dual focus (Academic and Career and Technical) that would provide for closer alignment to the Individual Graduation Plan and possible increased student achievement. Does the KBE concur?
- KDE recommends including a score requirement on the SAT or ACT for the Commonwealth Diploma. Does the KBE concur?
- KDE recommends continuing to provide reimbursements for the AP Exams and expand the reimbursements to include IB, if a minimum score of 3 is earned on the AP exam and a minimum score of 4 is earned on the IB exam up to the maximum number of courses required within the regulation to earn the Commonwealth Diploma. Does the KBE concur?
- KDE recommends allowing only students with disabilities to count American Sign Language as the Foreign Language requirement. Does the KBE concur?

### **Impact on Getting to Proficiency:**

Proficiency in all content areas involves students taking rigorous courses, a level of student accountability and attainment of performance standards.

### **Groups Consulted and Brief Summary of Responses:**

The Local Superintendents Advisory Council will forward its input to the KBE in a letter from that body following its September 27, 2005, meeting.

These recommendations will also be shared with the Instructional Support Network. Their comments will be summarized and shared with KBE members at their December meeting.

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**Deputy Commissioner**

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**Commissioner of Education**

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